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ABSTRACT

Obtaining and evaluating career information is a beneficial activity for high school students. Although a potential source of this information is parents, students do not necessarily have meaningful career discussions with their parents. An activity, "That's My Mom" / "That's My Dad" was developed to encourage more parent-student career decisions. In this activity, high school students attempt to identify which individual on a panel is their parent, based upon asking questions about what they do at work. As students participate in this activity they tend to realize that having additional career dialogs with their parents is a good idea. The author suggests using this activity as part of a Career Day or Night for a company, local high school or youth organization. (Author)

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Mom and Dad:
An Untapped Source for Career Information

by

Ronald G. Shapiro

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Mom and Dad: An Untapped Source For Career Information

Ronald G. Shapiro, Ph.D.

IBM

Abstract

Obtaining and evaluating career information is a beneficial activity for High School Students. Although a potential source of this information is parents, students do not necessarily have meaningful career discussions with their parents. An activity, "That's My Mom" / "That's My Dad" was developed to encourage more parent-student career discussions. In this activity, high school students attempt to identify which individual on a panel is their parent, based upon asking the panelists questions about what they do at work As students participate in this activity they tend to realize that having additional career dialogs with their parents is a good idea. If you need to organize a Career Day or Night for your company, local high school or youth organization this activity may be for you!

Introduction

Students need to make a number of career related decisions during the high school years. For example, they may need to decide whether to take advanced math and science courses in high school, whether to enroll in a summer science program or select a job which may offer the opportunity to earn money. They may also need to decide what college or university to attend, and what major to select.

Career programs sponsored by schools, local industries, and community service organizations can provide students with valuable information to facilitate their decisions. Parents and

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relatives provide another potential source for career information, however this source remains at least partially untapped. I have noted this through:

- being asked career questions from high school students which their parents could have answered more effectively than I
- observing middle school student inability to identify their parent in the "What's My Job Mystery Guest" (Shapiro, 2001a) activity. (In this activity, middle school students (blindfolded) need to decide if a mystery guest is their parent by asking a series of "Yes" / "No" questions about the work the mystery guest does.)

I have also noticed that after participating in the "What's My Job" activity students have stated that they need to talk more with their parents. Thus, the activity is successful in encouraging more parent-student career dialog with middle school students.

Working from the successful track record of "What's My Job" and hypothesizing that high school students also need encouragement to talk with their parents about careers, I developed a similar activity for Career Explorations (Shapiro, 2001b), a High School students program. Typically some parents attend Career Explorations along with their students. Thus, the current objectives were to:

- Develop a program sufficiently challenging, interesting and enjoyable for high school students and their parents
- Involve as many of the parents as possible in sharing some career information with the students in attendance
- Encouraging students to communicate more with their parents.

The current activity "That's My Mom" / "That's My Dad" was developed to meet these objectives. In this activity high school students attempt to identify which individual on a panel is their parent based upon asking the panelists questions about what they do at work.

Procedure

Selecting Student and Adult Participants:

1. Four students and their parents are selected to be contestants. The activity can be made more or less challenging by selecting parents with relatively similar or relatively dissimilar careers. All are brought up on the stage.
2. The students are blindfolded and seated in a random order on one side of the stage.
3. To make the task more challenging, after the students are blindfolded, an additional adult with a career relatively similar to that of the other adult panelists is also selected.
4. The five adults are seated in random order on the other side of the stage.
5. Four of the adults (three parents plus the additional adult) are assigned a number. One of the parents is not assigned a number and is excused from the panel.
6. Students are told that three of their parents and one other adult from the audience were selected to be on the adults' panel.

Explaining the Rules:

1. Students may ask the adult panelists any "Yes" / "No" question that relates to what they do at work, such as "Panelist # 1: Do you conduct meetings?" or "Panelist #2: Do you always use a cell phone at work?" Students are not allowed to include people's names or job titles in their questions -- as these are more related to whom people know, not what they do.
2. A given question may only be asked of one panelist in the entire game.
3. The adult panelist questioned answers by nodding "Yes" or "No" (or holding up a "Yes" or "No" sign.). The moderator announces whether the answer was "Yes" or "No" (providing the question falls within the rules of the game).
4. Each student panelist is called upon to ask one adult panelist a question. After all students have asked one question of the adult panelist of their choice, a second round of questions begins. This process continues until the student panelists run out of questions.

5. Once the student panelists run out of questions each student panelist is asked to identify their parent.

Additional Activity:

At the conclusion of the activity, the parent panelists might each be asked to describe their work for five or ten minutes.

Results

None of the participants were able to identify their parents based upon asking career relevant questions. Prior to our instituting Rule 2 (above), "A given question may only be asked of one panelist in the entire game," one student successfully identified her father by asking each panelist the identical question about cell phone usage, suspecting that most of the parents would respond affirmatively but that her father would respond negatively. As the student said "I did not know too much about my dad's job, other than he doesn't leave his cell phone on." To eliminate this strategy we instituted Rule 2.

A second student was able to select her parent through another method, not completely associated with asking questions. This student eliminated two of the panelists through asking career relevant questions, but she could not determine which of the two remaining panelists was her parent. To give her an opportunity to complete the task successfully, we had her identify her parent by handshake. She was immediately successful at this task.

Discussion

"That's My Mom" / "That's My Dad" encourages parent/student dialog on careers. In an unsolicited comment one of our parents said "I appreciated your program and approach - it did start a dialog between my daughter, Erin, and I about my job and other possible job opportunities she could consider. Interestingly, our son who is younger, heard some of these discussions and also got in on these talks" (Sean C. Ryan). Erin Ryan, in her review of this article, said "I had a fun time playing and did want to find out more about what he did afterwards. I think it is a good idea to let other people use the activity to get them more interested in what their parents do."

Based upon comments such as those from Sean and Erin Ryan and the presenter's observations this activity is recommended as an opening to career programs offered to high school students in a variety of settings including industry, community groups, and schools.

Note

I would like to thank Dr. Raquel Shapiro, a Professor at Rhode Island College, Erin Ryan, a student at Sacred Heart High School in Greenwich Connecticut, Karen Knight, the manager of Executive Communications at IBM, and Andrea Knight, a student at Somers High School in Somers New York, for helpful reviews of this paper.

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About The Author

Ronald G. Shapiro, Ph.D. is the Program Manager for the IBM Technical Learning Curriculum. Ron received his B.A. from the University of Rochester and his M.A. and Ph.D. from Ohio State University in Experimental Psychology. Ron has taught psychology at the university level and presents regularly at professional psychologists' and educators' conferences, and to various high school and college student groups. He was recently elected as a fellow in the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society. Ron's email address is RSHAPIRO@US.IBM.COM.

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